

**NICOLAS ROLAND,
SOURCE FOR THE COLLECTION
OF JOHN BAPTIST DE LA SALLE
(3/3)**

Brother Joseph Le Bars

**Clothe me with the new self
which is created according
to God and in holiness.**

Roland is content with the invitation, "saying to him that he clothe you..." De La Salle strongly believes in the value of the word of God. He never hesitates to express this thought in his letters nor to cite the appropriate verse from St. Paul. At the same time, as a true teacher, he shows the Brothers how to conduct themselves and suggests to them a passage from Scripture that he had recently added to those proposed in the list of "Scriptural texts that can help the Brothers..." (Collection, 95).

The citation is almost precisely the same as in the Amelote edition of 1688: "You are clothed again as a new man, created according to God in justice and in holiness of truth" (Eph. 4: 24).

When completely dressed

This expression is not found in Roland. It portrays the sequence of actions: "As soon as you awake...; rise up...; dress yourself...; when dressed..." The successive steps in the ceremonial of rising lead up to entrance into the room where the Exercises are held. The word "completely" insists on the importance of good manners, modesty and decency. The expression takes up again the Rule already cited (though it is expressed in the negative):

"but they shall not do so (go to the Exercises) until they are completely dressed."

The Rule states, following the already-cited article 6:

"they shall comb their hair and wash themselves; then everyone shall read in private the Imitation of Christ during the time that remains."

The approach of the Rule is more directive and detailed than that of the Collection. Does the text of the Collection predate the Rule? It is not impossible, for the Rule codified the community's practices. See CL 15 on the history of the Collection.

remain before God like a nothing, acknowledging your **Creator and Sovereign Lord**, who gives you life and preserves it only that you may use it in his service.

consider yourself as a new-born before God and realise that he is the sovereign Creator of your being, he who bestows and preserves life so that you can employ it in his service.

The terms are very close to one another. The distinction between "remain" and "consider yourself" has already been made at the beginning of this essay, as well as a second time.

Both authors share this sense of the grandeur and majesty of God.

"Prostrate with profound respect before your infinite and adorable majesty..."

says the formula of vows used by the Brothers, one of the most solemn expressions from the mouth and pen of John Baptist de La Salle.

In comparison, nature is nothing, for it requires being born.

"God is infinitely above all created things, even life itself, and therefore these deserve no consideration whatsoever in comparison with the Author of all." (M. 70, 2)

The phraseology in the Collection expresses well the attitude of adoration described by De La Salle in The Duties of a Christian.

The word "sovereign", according to a dictionary of that era, when used as a noun signifies "the first being, the almighty" and as an adjective means "having nothing below him".

The word "creator", in its fullest sense, is reserved for God alone. To some extent, these two words "sovereign" and "creator" say the same thing. In this respect, John Baptist de La Salle's preference is to modify the text by using the word "creator" by itself and then the precise phrase "sovereign Lord".

The text "acknowledging your creator and sovereign Lord" is also found in the Duties of a Christian (Da, p. 105) and in the Collection (p. 12), in the treatise on the Method of Mental Prayer, referring to the Act of Adoration.

The Founder does not retain the word "conservator", which sounds strange, besides, though perhaps less so today.

The rest of the passage comes from prayer formulas that were common at that epoch.

Observe silence faithfully
until the time for mental prayer. **Long for the moment** when it will begin.

This section is unique to the Founder. He is a great lover of silence, and he insists time and time again that the Brothers keep silence faithfully:

"It is the primary means to establish regularity in a house". (M. 92, 1)

Were the Brothers inclined to break silence?

Religious houses had a tradition of the great silence. The Rule of 1705 says, in article 1 of the Chapter on Silence:

"The Brothers keep exact silence outside the time of recreation..."; and in article 14:

"They keep rigorous silence from the time of retiring at night until after morning prayer..."

Because the expression in the text of the Collection seems less imperative, could it be a version written prior to the Rule?

This is the third instance in which we have been led to ask ourselves this question.

long for the moment

This state of readiness is already a preparation for prayer. It makes us think of the Psalm: "As the deer thirsts..." This is yet another instance of sensing the impatience to be alone

with God. The Brothers are invited to place themselves in this attitude of yearning.

This insistence is somewhat strange, when everything that follows is to be done in a spirit of prayer. However, it is true that these actions might give rise to distractions.

Did not Christ himself set aside moments of intense prayer?

Nothing is said about vocal prayers. Was this text written before their inclusion in the Exercises?

The "Schedule of daily regulations" indicates in article 7:

At 5 o'clock the bell rings for mental prayer and everyone kneels down, whereupon the Brother Director says, "Live Jesus in our hearts", and they reply, "Forever".

Then they proceed to the oratory for prayer. First the vocal prayers are said, and then the subject of mental prayer is read. The period of mental prayer lasts until 6 o'clock."

Resolve from this **moment** to be **very exact** and **punctual** in the performance of all the community exercises. *resolve from this time on to be punctual at all the community exercises*

The difference between "moment" and "time" doesn't seem very great. "Moment", both more limited and more precise than "time", indicates the start of a series of exercises at the beginning of the day, as is the case here. We see once again the importance of the exact word for John Baptist de La Salle, who is more rigorous in his wording than is Roland.

"Very exact" seems a bit redundant along with "punctual", but the first draws attention to all of the details, while the second refers to the moment of execution. Meditation 8, "On Exact Obedience", points out the meaning of exactitude:

You should not only comply as to the thing commanded, but also as to the manner in which it is to be done (2nd point). Another thing to be observed with regard to exact obedience is the time (3rd point).

We see therefore that for De La Salle these terms have two different meanings.

"Punctual" is used by Roland in the feminine form (in the French), because he is speaking of Sisters.

"All the community exercises" refers to the necessity of fidelity both to the Rule and to the community's customs.

for fidelity in performing well all these actions throughout the day *for fidelity often*

The Founder adds a complementary phrase to the word "fidelity" that is used by both authors, a word which Roland leaves somewhat imprecise for lack of a reference to its application.

Once again, we note the precision and attention to detail: "performing well", "all these actions", "throughout the day". Here we see the man who advises the Brothers to use with their students only "words which are easy to understand" and to explain. There is no doubt that good teaching practice led him to this observation. We can never be too clear. Did not this attitude begin even in 1672 when he found himself responsible for his own young brothers and sisters? Would not the theological student have had to "place himself at their level"? This expression was always dear to him.

depends on this **first action** and **resolution**. *depends on this good resolution.*

Might not "first action" underline the importance for the rest of the day of arising and of the attitude taken at the moment of waking up? To get off to a good start is essential for John Baptist de La Salle. Note the first part of the Method of Mental Prayer.

In Roland's text, it is hard to understand the sense of the word "good". Is it a question of a good resolution to take or of a firm resolution?

Both authors speak in this manner in order to underscore the importance of orienting our thoughts and actions to God from the beginning of the day, in order to assure its quality and purpose.

These, then, are the corresponding words and phrases in the two texts. There remain two passages from Nicolas Roland that De La Salle does not use, either in whole or in part:

"In these sentiments acknowledge his goodness, adore him with all your heart, offer yourself to him by consecrating yourself entirely to his service, ask for his help, abandon yourself to his guidance to do and to suffer everything that will happen to you through his will."

Here we can see the outline and even the specifics of a morning prayer, including the different acts to follow. These are the same sentiments that we find in the prayer that was used in the past: "My God, I know that I am unworthy..."

Nicolas Roland invites the Sisters

"after getting dressed, to kneel and to make acts of adoration and of offering to God all the actions of the day... At five-thirty o'clock the bell rings to go to the place where vocal prayer begins..." (Positio, p. 356)

The Founder of the Brothers doesn't see the need to name these acts precisely. No doubt he counts on the vocal prayers of the community to do that.

This comparison of texts brings to light several traits of the Founder that need to be verified and confirmed by other observations.

We see, in effect, that he was inspired by Nicolas Roland and that, in certain places, he followed Roland's text very closely. We note a rewriting that is more precise, more pedagogical, with some corrections of grammar and with a search for the exact wording. There is detailed explication at times, as well as a refusal to use picturesque turns of phrase.

De La Salle uses scriptural citations more frequently: four compared with Roland's two, plus one allusion. His quotations from Saint Paul are more complete and exact. More extended research would permit us to determine without doubt which translation he copied or used as his inspiration.

The reading of this text shows how much John Baptist de La Salle loved mental prayer, and we can sense, almost without his saying it, how he himself would "long for the moment when it will begin".

After reading the two versions of the text, we have the impression that Roland is responding to a Sister who had confided her soul to him, the passages being somewhat clinical in the manner of a spiritual director. De La Salle's text reminds us of a fervent, almost lyrical, exhortation (a tone that, without being exceptional, is not at all characteristic of him), something designed to encourage the Brothers to "perform all their actions well". ●